

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

TYSHEIM MURPHY,	:	
	:	Civil Action No. 08-226 (RMB)
Plaintiff,	:	
	:	
v.	:	OPINION
	:	
EILEEN LABARRE, et al.,	:	
	:	
Defendants.	:	

APPEARANCES:

TYSHEIM MURPHY, Plaintiff Pro Se
149873
Atlantic County Justice Facility
5060 Atlantic Avenue
Mays Landing, New Jersey 08330

BUMB, District Judge

Plaintiff Tysheim Murphy, currently confined at the Atlantic County Justice Facility in Mays Landing, New Jersey, seeks to bring this action in forma pauperis pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, alleging violations of his constitutional rights. Based on his affidavit of indigence and the absence of three qualifying dismissals within 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g), the Court will grant plaintiff's application to proceed in forma pauperis, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) (1998), and order the Clerk of the Court to file the Complaint.

At this time, the Court must review the Complaint, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A, to determine whether it

should be dismissed as frivolous or malicious, for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or because it seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. For the reasons set forth below, the Court concludes that the Complaint should be dismissed.

I. BACKGROUND

The Complaint names the following defendants: Eileen Labarre, Esq. and Robert Moran, Esq., both public defenders. The following factual allegations are taken from the Complaint, and are accepted for purposes of this screening only. The Court has made no findings as to the veracity of Plaintiff's allegations.

Plaintiff alleges that defendant Labarre, his public defender or assigned counsel for his state criminal proceedings, has not provided him with discovery, has not filed any motions on his behalf, and has been confrontational with plaintiff about the handling of his case. Plaintiff adds that defendant Moran, the deputy public defender, declined to provide plaintiff with new counsel despite plaintiff's request. (Complaint, ¶ 4).

Plaintiff asks that Labarre be removed as his counsel and that he receive compensatory damages in the amount of \$1500.00 per day for each day he remains incarcerated. He also asks for an unspecified amount in punitive damages. (Compl., ¶ 5).

II. STANDARDS FOR A SUA SPONTE DISMISSAL

The Prison Litigation Reform Act ("PLRA"), Pub. L. No. 104-134, §§ 801-810, 110 Stat. 1321-66 to 1321-77 (April 26, 1996), requires a district court to review a complaint in a civil action in which a prisoner is proceeding in forma pauperis or seeks redress against a governmental employee or entity. The Court is required to identify cognizable claims and to sua sponte dismiss any claim that is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A.

In determining the sufficiency of a pro se complaint, the Court must be mindful to construe it liberally in favor of the plaintiff. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520-21 (1972); United States v. Day, 969 F.2d 39, 42 (3d Cir. 1992). The Court must "accept as true all of the allegations in the complaint and all reasonable inferences that can be drawn therefrom, and view them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff." Morse v. Lower Merion School Dist., 132 F.3d 902, 906 (3d Cir. 1997). The Court need not, however, credit a pro se plaintiff's "bald assertions" or "legal conclusions." Id.

A complaint is frivolous if it "lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact." Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989) (interpreting the predecessor of § 1915(e)(2), the

former § 1915(d)). The standard for evaluating whether a complaint is "frivolous" is an objective one. Deutsch v. United States, 67 F.3d 1080, 1086-87 (3d Cir. 1995).

A pro se complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim only if it appears "'beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of his claim which would entitle him to relief.'" Haines, 404 U.S. at 521 (quoting Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41, 45-46 (1957)); Milhouse v. Carlson, 652 F.2d 371, 373 (3d Cir. 1981). However, where a complaint can be remedied by an amendment, a district court may not dismiss the complaint with prejudice, but must permit the amendment. Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 34 (1992); Alston v. Parker, 363 F.3d 229 (3d Cir. 2004)(complaint that satisfied notice pleading requirement that it contain short, plain statement of the claim but lacked sufficient detail to function as a guide to discovery was not required to be dismissed for failure to state a claim; district court should permit a curative amendment before dismissing a complaint, unless an amendment would be futile or inequitable); Grayson v. Mayview State Hospital, 293 F.3d 103, 108 (3d Cir. 2002) (dismissal pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)); Shane v. Fauver, 213 F.3d 113, 116-17 (3d Cir. 2000) (dismissal pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c)(1)); Urrutia v. Harrisburg County Police Dept., 91 F.3d 451, 453 (3d Cir. 1996).

III. SECTION 1983 ACTIONS

Plaintiff brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging violations of his civil rights guaranteed under the United States Constitution. Section 1983 provides in relevant part:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory ... subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress

Thus, to state a claim for relief under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege, first, the violation of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States and, second, that the alleged deprivation was committed or caused by a person acting under color of state law. West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); Piecknick v. Pennsylvania, 36 F.3d 1250, 1255-56 (3d Cir. 1994).

II. ANALYSIS

Plaintiff appears to assert a claim of ineffective assistance of counsel against his appointed counsel, Eileen Labarre, Esq., who is representing Plaintiff in his pending state criminal proceedings, as well as against the deputy public defender, Robert Moran, Esq., for refusing to appoint new counsel. These defendants are not subject to liability under

§ 1983 because they are not a state actors.

A public defender "does not act under color of state law when performing a lawyer's traditional functions as counsel to a defendant in a criminal proceeding." Polk Co. v. Dodson, 454 U.S. 312, 325 (1981) (a public defender performing a lawyer's traditional functions as counsel to a defendant, such as determining trial strategy and whether to plead guilty, is not acting under color of state law); Steward v. Meeker, 459 F.2d 669 (3d Cir. 1972) (privately-retained counsel does not act under color of state law when representing client); Thomas v. Howard, 455 F.2d 228 (3d Cir. 1972) (court-appointed pool attorney does not act under color of state law).

However, even if Plaintiff had pleaded facts establishing that Labarre and Moran were acting under color of state law, the allegations in the Complaint assert nothing more than a violation of Plaintiff's right to effective assistance of counsel. Such a claim must first be raised in Plaintiff's ongoing state criminal case; a federal court generally will not intercede to consider issues that the plaintiff has an opportunity to raise before the state court. See Younger v. Harris, 401 U.S. 37 (1971).

Moreover, to the extent that Plaintiff's criminal trial is no longer pending, and he has been convicted and sentenced on the state charges, any claim of ineffective assistance of counsel in this regard must first be exhausted via state court remedies,

i.e., by direct appeal or other available state court review; and then, if appropriate, by filing a federal habeas application to assert any violations of federal constitutional or statutory law, namely, his claim of ineffective assistance of counsel. Preiser v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 475 (1973). Here, Plaintiff admits that his criminal case is ongoing and he has not been convicted or sentenced yet.

Therefore, because defendants were not acting under color of state law when representing Plaintiff, and because any claim of ineffective assistance of counsel must be asserted under a federal habeas petition after Plaintiff has been convicted and exhausted his state court remedies, this Complaint asserting liability under § 1983 must be dismissed for failure to state a claim at this time, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and 1915A(b)(1).

V. CONCLUSION

Therefore, for the reasons expressed above, the Court will dismiss the Complaint without prejudice, for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and § 1915A(b)(1). An appropriate Order follows.

s/Renée Marie Bumb
RENÉE MARIE BUMB
United States District Judge

Dated: January 23, 2008